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**Postcolonial urban futures: Imagining and governing India's
smart urban age**

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**Postcolonial urban futures: Imagining and governing India’s
smart urban age.**

Abstract: This paper examines the ‘future’ as a blueprint for social power relations in postcolonial urbanism. It addresses a crucial gap in the rich scholarship on postcolonial urbanism that has largely ignored the ‘centrality of time’ (Chakrabarty, 2000) in the politics and speed of urban transformations. This paper takes postcolonial urbanism as a ‘colonisation of/with time’ (Adam, 2004) that reaches across spaces, scales and times of the past, present and future to produce cities as spatio-temporal entities. Using the lens of ‘futures’ (Urry, 2016) as a practice of imagining and governing cities through speed, this paper analyses India’s national 100 Smart Cities Mission through a set of popular myths that create a dialectic relation between past and future. It suggests that smart cities in India are marked by the deployment of two parallel mythologies of speed – nationhood and technology. While the former refers to a mythical moral state, the latter refers to transparent and accountable governance in order to produce smart cities in the image of the moral state. The paper concludes that while postcolonial future time is imagined at the scale of the smart city, there is a simultaneous recalibration of its governance at the scale of the nation.

Keywords:

Postcolonial futures , smart city , mythology , good governance ,
technology , speed and time

This paper examines the ‘future’ as a blueprint for social power relations in postcolonial urbanism. It addresses a crucial gap in the rich scholarship on postcolonial urbanism that has largely ignored the ‘centrality of time’ (Chakrabarty, 2000) in the politics and speed of urban transformations. This paper takes postcolonial urbanism as a ‘colonisation of/with time’ (Adam, 2004) that reaches across spaces, scales and times of the past, present and future to produce cities as spatio-temporal entities. Using the lens of ‘futuring’ (Urry, 2016) as a practice of imagining and governing cities through speed, this paper analyses India’s national 100 Smart Cities Mission through a set of popular myths that create a dialectic relation between past and future. It suggests that smart cities in India are marked by the deployment of two parallel mythologies of speed – nationhood and technology. While the former refers to a mythical moral state, the latter refers to transparent and accountable governance in order to produce smart cities in the image of the moral state. The paper concludes that while postcolonial future time is imagined at the scale of the smart city, there is a simultaneous recalibration of its governance at the scale of the nation.

Introduction

“Cities in the past were built on riverbanks. They are now built along highways. But in the future, they will be built based on availability of optical fiber networks and next-generation infrastructure.” [PM of India, 2015].

In a speech launching a national programme of 100 smart cities in 2015, India’s Prime Minister said ‘Nation needs to think big and focus on skill, scale and speed to revive India’s growth story’. In order to achieve this, he noted that India’s future cities will no longer depend upon its natural resources; rather on its proximity to ‘next-generation infrastructure’ that will produce new ‘cities built on i-ways’. This vision of the future constructs a linear trajectory of progress, which sees history as slow and

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organic, and the future as an algorithmic spatio-temporality marked by the speed and scale of action. This reinvention of the future by referencing the past can be seen as a practice of what Urry has called ‘futuring’ (Urry, 2016) – the imagining, governing and performing of particular visions in the present with a view to reinforcing power in the oncoming times. In India, ‘futuring’ includes the discursive, political and material practice of anticipatory action taken in the context of an unfolding dialectic between past, present and future time. This dialectic manifests in the present – the ‘crises’ of rapid urbanization, rise in urban population, the breakdown of infrastructure and law and order as well as perceived ‘threats’ to nationhood and national identity. Futuring as Adam (2008: 7) argues, includes a whole range of ‘socio-political, legal, scientific, economic and everyday performative, enacting practices’, of technologically enhanced urbanism. It reinforces many aspects of the future city as – a vision, a form of representation, a scaling of action, a performance, as well as a practice of nation-building that have become the blueprints for action in the present (Bell, 1999). In this context, India’s smart cities reflect particular ‘futures in the making’ (Adam and Groves, 2007; Tutton, 2017) that are not just representational or imagined, rather spatio-temporal, material-aesthetic and technological.

One of the key practices of futuring by smart cities in India has been to initiate processes of ‘fast urbanism’ (Datta, 2017) – a strategy of taking advantage of the speed of urbanization, whereby bureaucratic, legal and political processes are streamlined. The 100 Smart Cities challenge, conceived as part of the ruling party’s election manifesto in 2014 is an integral part of its fast urbanism strategy. The Smart Cities vision is a global image of future cities driven by ubiquitous technology (Townsend, 2013). In India, the national Smart Cities Mission aims at transform 100 existing cities through the retrofitting of digital infrastructures and software

technologies. This is supported by a federal investment package of \$1million shared equally across each city. The smart cities mission was announced in 2014, approved in April 2015, 98 cities nominated in August 2015, first 20 winning cities announced in January 2016, with a total of 90 cities announced till June 2017. This fast-tracked opportunistic moment of India's urban age is constructed as dialectically oppositional to conventional planning and governance in India, the latter seen as slow, parochial and obfuscatory to processes of economic growth.

However, the parameters of the Indian smart city are up for grabs. While global definitions of smart cities are mainly data-driven, the Indian smart cities break from this mould to note that

'there is no universally accepted definition of a smart city. It means different things to different people. The conceptualisation of Smart City, therefore, varies from city to city and country to country, depending on the level of development, willingness to change and reform, resources and aspirations of the city residents. A smart city would have a different connotation in India than, say, Europe. Even in India, there is no one way of defining a smart city.' (Ministry of Urban Development, GoI, 2017)

Indian smart cities are required to incorporate 'a range of approaches - digital and information technologies, urban planning best practices, public-private partnerships, and policy change - to make a difference.' (Government of India, 2016). Examples of smart initiatives include: online platforms for citizen engagement, CCTV surveillance, transit hubs and technological solutions to improve the efficiency of physical infrastructures.

But this smart city upholds a set of popular myths about the future that have a dialectical relationship with a mythological past. It has thus turned out to be a 'wicked

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problem’ (Tutton, 2017) evident in the continuous tensions in the Indian public realm between an imagined future of Hindu nationhood and how to govern this future through technology in the present. This has been observed recently in a series of public lynchings of ordinary citizens to be selling, buying or consuming beef, or couples believed to be marrying out of faith as well as the killings of liberals and activists perceived to be ‘hurting religious sentiments’. Using the lens of ‘futuring’ I will make three arguments. First, that *Indian smart cities draw upon strategies of ‘fast urbanism’ (Datta, 2017) that construct a dialectic relationship between the past and present in postcolonial futures*. This means using the rhetoric and practices of speed and time efficiencies offered by smart cities as ‘space-time machines’ (Kitchin, 2017) to mark the end of oppressive colonial legacies and the onset of a future time of prosperity. This futuring by speed is omnidirectional, which presents the smart city as the prototype of a postcolonial urban future – a ‘possible, present future, a future that is pictured, planned, projected, pursued, and performed in the present.’ (Adam, 2008).

Second, postcolonial urbanism is marked by the deployment of two parallel mythologies of the future – nationhood and technology. These two distinct but connected storylines produce a dialectic between rational and mythological time to reinforce strategies of speed and fast urbanism. I argue that while nationhood constructs a mythology of the future, technology too begins to acquire mythological dimensions as the only possible future. Smart cities, constructed as India’s urban future thus becomes fraught with the ambiguities of mythical pasts and technological futures that begins to inter-reference each other for legitimacy. Understanding these dialectics between mythology and technology thus enables us to conceptualise smart cities as a vernacular idiom of postcolonial urbanism in India. This relocates earlier focus on ‘geographies of theory’ (Roy 2009), ‘extrospective urbanism’ (McCann and

Ward, 2011) 'planetary urbanization' (Brenner, 2014; Brenner and Schmid, 2015; Merrifield, 2013) or 'worlding' (Roy and Ong, 2011) to the spatio-temporality of a Hindu mythical past that produces a blueprint for a technological urban future.

Finally, while postcolonial futures are calibrated at the scale of the smart city, there is a simultaneous recalibration of fast urbanism at the scale of the nation.

Futuring through the simultaneous scaling down and scaling up of speed produces another set of dialectics between the scales of the nation and the city. The 'vision' reports of global consultancies, adoption of smart city packages by city governments, the enactment of laws and policies by the federal state to support the making of smart cities, national and international smart city competitions, all make evident that the future of the postcolonial state is now being fundamentally imagined at the scale of the smart city. However, as I will argue in this paper, its governance entails a loss of political power of the city, which contradicts current 'urban age' visions on the need for cities to have more political autonomy. I suggest that this produces a strategic ambiguity between imagined futures as urban autonomy and governing futures as national sovereignty that has come to define the postcolonial urban moment.

This paper is based on a range on narratives, discourses, stories and images of the future that were part of a research network titled 'Learning from the Utopian City'. Drawing upon the network activities, this paper I have used two scales of enquiry in this paper. First, is an analysis of publicly available policies and documents on India's urban age, with a focus on the smart cities mission. A key source is the federal myGov.in Website which hosts most of the public documents on the 100 smart cities challenge. A second scale of analysis is embedded in the interactions within the space of a series of city stakeholder workshops organised in India. The workshops brought together a range of participants (between 20-30) from government departments,

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private developers, ICT companies, NGOs, residents’ welfare associations, slum dwellers associations and so on. Here, stakeholders met around a table to present and discuss their visions of the future Indian city. The key debates in the workshops were around the imagination of the future city, how it should be governed and what it means to live in this future city. Stakeholders in government, third sector and subaltern groups exchanged their thoughts, ideas and perceptions about the smart city whilst also realising that the smart city held very different meanings across the table. The meaning of ‘smart city’ was encased in a morass of uncertainties – even amongst bureaucrats and consultants in our workshops, there was confusion and disagreement in terms of its definition and local manifestations, notwithstanding its regulatory and policy implementations. This paper focuses specifically on the imagination and governing of India’s urban future among the policy makers, civil servants and councillors – or those who loosely represent the ‘state’. The analysis and discussions that I present here do not focus on the details of these discussions per se, rather contextualises the emergence of particular storylines around futuring that represent a series of dialectics around mythology and technology vested in a smart urban age.

In the first half of this paper, I outline the theoretical imperative to understand postcolonial urban futures as a mythology of speed manifesting in the future smart city. I then focus on the dialectics of mythology and technology in the Indian context corresponding to the simultaneous emergence of Hindutva nationhood and technological governance directed towards the smart city. The second half of the paper analyses how several time-based initiatives around ‘Minimum Government, maximum governance’ shape of two parallel storylines around the smart city – Ram Rajya, the mythical Hindu kingdom imagined as India’s future and the father-son metaphor as a paradigm of centralised governance of the city by the state. I conclude

by discussing the impoverishment of the imagination in India's future and possibilities of its reimagination as a moral imperative of justice.

Postcolonial urban futures: The mythology of speed

Although contemporary Indian urban policy is rife with references to time in its creation of a prosperous urban future by capitalising on present opportunity, it is surprising that the 'future' as a spatio-temporality of knowledge and power has received so little attention in postcolonial urban theory. Over two decades of scholarship on postcolonial urbanism has produced a rich analysis of the historiographies and genealogies of colonial rule and state governmentality (D Asher Ghertner, 2014; Raghuram et al., 2014; Robinson, 2003; Roy, 2009, 2011a; Roy and Ong, 2011; Schindler, 2017). This rich postcolonial literature critiques the neoliberal policies of urban governance that have sought to transfer responsibility of social and economic welfare onto the workings of the free market. Yet without a critique of how imaginations of the future drive contemporary urbanism and constructions of urban history, the rich postcolonial literature continues to be largely 'presentist' in approach. Despite recent observations that technological and scientific progress inculcated in smart cities transformations is driving a 'digital turn' in postcolonial urbanism (Datta, 2018) – there is little if any attention paid to the future as a spatio-temporal construction of the present.

Examining postcolonial urbanism through a lens of futuring means paying careful attention to what Chakrabarty (2000) has noted as the 'centrality of time' in understanding the connections between past, present and future in urban theory. Postcolonial time is not simply a periodization of the postcolonial moment and its construction relative to other moments of the colonial, premodern, modern and postmodern. In an anthropological approach to the future, Appadurai (2013) argues

that the future is a 'cultural fact' with increased moral primacy in the present. Postcolonial time is thus a critique of particular modes of historical emergence of regimes of power and governmentality that fundamentally shapes societal constructions of the relationship between past, present and future. This is not to suggest that postcolonial time is incommensurable with clock time or historical time, rather as an 'othered' time, it always maintains a dialectic relationship with the linearity of modern time (Ganguly, 2004). Postcolonial urbanism can then be taken as a grid of social power relations that reach across spaces, scales and times of the past, present and future to produce cities as spatio-temporal entities. This involves both a 'colonization of time' and a 'colonization with time' (Adam, 2004). The former refers to the transformation of time into an exchange value, its quantification, capitalisation and ahistoricisation, such as evident in the time-efficiencies offered by technology. The latter refers to time as a developmental imperative that unfolds through a range of policy initiatives with time-bound outputs and expectations, such as evident in the smart cities challenge.

As an instrument of a rule of law and state sovereignty, manipulations of time through speed is a key instrument of postcolonial urbanism. The increasing colonisation of/with time means that postcolonial urbanism can be seen as fundamentally about a mythology of speed. This is the strategy of 'fast urbanism' a mythology of time efficiency, which fuses speed and politics in the modern city (Virilio, 2006). This fusion produces what Virilio notes as 'the government of a differential motility, of harnessing and mobilising, incarcerating and accelerating things and people' (Virilio, 2006: 8). This produces 'a world in motion, expressed in translations of strategic space into logistical time, and back again.' In other words, postcolonial urbanism's relationship with time is in using the politics and rhetorics of

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3 speed in establishing rule of law over territories and populations in the postcolony.
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5 This is evident in India, where policy phrases such as ‘futureproofing’, ‘fast-
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7 forwarding’, ‘leapfrogging’ and ‘jumpstarting’ among many others direct material-
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9 aesthetic visions and policies of smart cities. This ‘presence of the future’ (Anderson,
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11 2010) in imagining and governing the city is evident in the mythology of speed in
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13 producing India’s smart urban future.
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16 Here I use mythology as both a storyline and an instrument of power. On one
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18 hand mythology relies upon an incessant flow of analogies between past and future.
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20 Mythology is a means of transposing quotidian experiences of the city into a moral
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22 language that relates it to a multiplicity of pasts and futures. On the other hand, myth
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24 serves, not only as a map or representation, but as a spatio-temporality of power
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26 engaged in the transformation of the Indian city into modern, technological and
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28 digitally enhanced spaces. Imagining and governing the future then produces an
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30 omnidirectional logistics of speed around a set of mythological constructs of the past,
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32 present and future.
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35 In India, these time constructs are evident in the politics of Hindutva
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37 nationalism since the 20th century which has used mythology as the moral imperative
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39 to signal technocratic futures (Udayakumar, 2005). Hindutva nationalism has seen a
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41 resurgence since 2014, using a set of mythologies surrounding symbols of perceived
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43 ‘Hindu morality’ and incredible symbolic and physical violence in the public realm.
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45 The smart city provides technology as a ‘psychological buffering’ (Krishna, 1992)
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47 against this violence, maintained through the perceived ‘neutrality’ of development,
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49 modernity and technology. This buffering reconciles the violence of the past in the
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51 future by fusing mythologies of nationhood with ‘objective and impartial’ science
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53 (Udayakumar, 2005). Through a creative translation of mythical motifs, the Hindutva
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ideology rationalises a technological future as a reconstruction of a moral mythological past (Corbridge et al., 2005). The smart city as a continuum of this logics uses the myth of a moral state as a metaphor for India’s smart urban age. This fuses mythology with modern science into a ‘singular future, ... through a systematic nowcasting in the present’, where the ‘futuristic present is potent and powerful’ (Udayakumar, 2005: 11). Thus ‘history becomes a sacred blend of cultural logic, social organisation, ideological convictions, political program and future vision’ (Udayakumar, 2005: 6), while the future becomes a blend of mythical history and technology.

Thus it is not that the past is ignored, or that the technological modernity of the smart city ruptures and erases the past; rather that two versions of the past begin to emerge in the future smart city. The first one is a ‘ancient future’ (Udayakumar, 2005) where all sorts of symbols of morality coexist with a ‘latent future’ (Adam, 2008). The second one is a more recent past – an ‘anxious history’ (Udayakumar, 2005), where enormous symbolic violence (Islamic rule, colonialism, and corruption among others) is deemed to have closed down possibilities of a moral future. While the anxious history is oppressive, ancient future is cast as present opportunity in the smart city. In this ‘nowcasting’, the moral state is the imagined future, smart city is its performance.

Finally, the mythology of speed vested in the smart city produces a set of scalar dialectics between the state and the city that challenges postcolonial urbanism’s current conflation of the nation and the city. In the governance of postcolonial futures, while speed is imagined at the scale of the smart city, it is from the scale of the nation state that this speed is governed. This dialectic between the state and the city is also the dialectic between imagining and governing the future. As I will argue further in

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3 this paper, smart cities offer the futuring of utopian ideas of speed vested in modernity
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5 and their subsequent socialization as markers of a moral state. The notion that
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7 technology enables a move from more traditional forms of rule vested in informal and
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9 extra-legal practices, accelerating towards more sophisticated, accountable and
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11 transparent structures of governance emboldens the image of the future moral state,
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13 and smart cities as its materialisation. By imagining and governing the future through
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15 the trope of the smart city, the Indian state urbanizes a global rhetoric of good
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17 governance through a state-sponsored smart city initiative that is paradoxically
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19 directed by the IT industry. I will argue that in this futuring, scale is of critical
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21 importance since the instrumentalisation of the moral state is imagined at the scale of
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23 the smart city. Yet unlike claims of global urban theory that indicates a wider move
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25 towards decentralisation from the federal to the urban, the smart city initiates a
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27 simultaneous descaling and rescaling. I will argue that while an 'ancient future' is
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29 imagined at the scale of the city, it is nonetheless governed at the scale of the nation,
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31 thus withdrawing power and autonomy from the future smart city.
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35 Governing the future smart city in this way requires a return to 'lawfare'
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37 (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2006) initiated and enacted by the state. To materialise the
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39 smart city as an Indian urban future, the state uses a set of laws, policies and
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41 bureaucratic procedures to first withdraw urban autonomy. Lawfare as a 'fetishization
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43 of law' claims to produce a more open, transparent and rational institution using 'due
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45 process' and regulatory structures initiated at the scale of the state, but that which
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47 ironically diminishes the sovereignty of the smart city to govern itself. I argue that
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49 this dialectics between the state and city and the resulting tensions between
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51 sovereignty and authority enable us to see futuring as a scalar power dynamics set
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53 within spatio-temporal regimes of state.
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Dialectics of Indian futures: Between mythology and technology

India’s postcolonial future has emerged along two simultaneous and connected pathways – mythology and technology. On the one hand, the Hindutva project which emerged since the early 20th century, have relied upon a historiography of ‘communal nationalism’ (Udayakumar, 2005: 33) using mythical characters such as Ram and the Hindu kingdom of Ram Rajya to construct an ‘ancient future’ (Udayakumar, 2005). *Ram Rajya* refers to the utopian kingdom of Ram, the ‘good ruler’ of Ayodhya who governed along moral principles in the Hindu epic Ramayana. Yet the violence of over 200 years of colonial subjugation and subsequent partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan – the riots, lynching, rapes, murders and other unspeakable crimes committed against Hindus and Muslims at a time that two nations were born in 1947 continues to provide the Hindu right a vocabulary of humiliation and victimhood in recent history (Pandey, 2001). In this context, Udayakumar (2005: 11) notes that ‘the history that Hindutva forces anxiously script and the ancient future that they envisage for India exist in the present’. Popular mythologies of the Hindu moral state of Ram Rajya are infused with meanings and emotions of national belonging to construct the terms and conditions of future nationhood. The Hindu right’s focus on the present as the spatio-temporal moment of futuring towards Ram Rajya has worked as a ‘symbolic language of authority’ (Hansen and Stepputat, 2001: 8) in postcolonial India. First in its use as a sign that the postcolonial state has shed its colonial burden, second in its institutionalization through discourse as the ‘authoritative language of the state and the medium through which the state acquires discursive presence and authority to authorize’ (Hansen and Stepputat, 2001: 2) and finally in its use to nationalize the ‘institutions of the state through inscription of a history and a shared community on landscapes and cultural practices.’

On the other hand, the postcolonial moment in India is also marked by a Nehruvian secular liberalism which borrowed from western models of rationality to push for technology as a path to progress. While the Hindu-right constructed an ancient future of the Hindu nation, the postcolonial state was cast by the Indian middle classes and political elite as the 'primary source of modernity' (Kaviraj, 2005) for the future. This narrative was nonetheless enshrined in state paternalism that pushed for decades of social and economic reforms through state laws, policies and institutions. The linear path assumed for development, the global agenda driven from the global North and the hegemonic image of the Western developmental model as the most desirable, typified the modern future in India post-independence (Schech, 2002). This was evident in the translation of global plans into development policies, that sought to redistribute social capital through tabula rasa planning which would seemingly provide an equal public realm for all citizens (see for example, Harrison 2001). This was also seen in the series of top-down plans, policies and laws in India such as the five-year development plans and national urban development policies which sought to address social inequalities through a focus on economic development and good governance. Most significantly, this vision of the future materialised in utopian grand city building projects in Chandigarh, Bhubaneshwar and Ahmedabad among others. These cities reached out to the future through a tabula rasa planning that rejected the past as parochial and embraced the future through the speed and time of modernity.

For the Hindu right, futuring was possible only by bringing in an ancient future of Ram Rajya that was also cast as the wellspring of techno-science. This imparted the modern Indian state with 'vital mythological dimensions that give its authority both historical aura and weight' (Hansen and Stepputat, 2001). During a

short-lived rule at the federal level in 1989, the Bharatiya Janta Party (which has been closely associated with the Hindu Right since its inception and used the concept of Ram Rajya since the 1980s) initiated a series of changes to state institutions that sought to invest in research and policies supporting this claim. In its manifesto of policies for Lok Sabha (local government) elections in May 1991, their party pamphlet stated, *'If there's a definition of an ideal state in India it has been the idea of Ram Rajya'*, (Bharatiya Janta Party 1991). Ram Rajya was repeatedly evoked by the BJP to critique earlier governments as divisive, unjust and corrupt in their 'pseudo-secularism' or 'appeasement of the minorities', turning what Bilimoria (2006: 2) has observed, 'the coat or dhoti of secularism inside out'. In 1991, using 'scientific' claims to correctly identify the authentic birthplace of Ram, Hindu Right activists demolished the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, which was claimed to stand on the exact site of Ram's birthplace. This led to widespread communal violence and rioting among Hindus and Muslims across the nation. Since then there has been concerted effort to establish a Ram temple in Ayodhya in the exact spot where the mosque had stood, which has sparked violence from time to time across India.

This mythology of the moral state was being bolstered at the same time as radical structural changes in laws, policies and governance in the public realm were reimagining the relationship between federal and urban scales. In 1992, following directives from global development agencies, a significant amendment was made to the Indian Constitution to incorporate a decentralised model of 'good governance'. Known as the 74th Amendment, this futuring by fast governance devolved the powers of the federal and regional states to establish local autonomy for Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) and enable fast decision-making and implementation of projects. ULBs were given Constitutional powers with respect to holding local elections, producing

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3 masterplans for future development, collecting taxes and revenues within their
4 jurisdiction and ensuring representation of marginal groups such as low caste or
5 religious minorities or women within their administrative structures. This
6 decentralization movement valorised development induced by market forces that was
7 backed by technological modernity. Significantly this paradigm of 'futuring' India by
8 speed was scaled down to its cities – socially, economically, politically and
9 developmentally. Although total autonomy was never realised, India's futuring was in
10 fact a desire to initiate fast urbanism by descaling the nation to the city.
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20 The foundation of this fast urbanism was built upon a 'silent revolution'
21 (Hoelscher, 2016) in Internet and Communications Technologies (ICT) since the
22 1990s. The national urban renewal mission which ran from the late 1990s to the early
23 2000s capitalised on this to initiate a series of transformations in state-citizen
24 relationships that shifted corporeal encounters with state institutions and actors to the
25 digital space of e-governance. Constructed as transparent, accountable and
26 incorruptible, e-governance and other ICT based urban management systems
27 nourished what Dasgupta (2015) notes as an 'ethico-political' belonging to the nation-
28 state. In this scenario, digital space and its purveyor – the IT industry was constructed
29 as one with a more ethical position to and in 'disdain of the corrupt state' (3), and thus
30 it legitimised technology as the underwriter of well-being. This 'seemingly
31 unproblematic passage [of ICT] from economic/corporate/capitalist [space] to the
32 social/public governance realm' (4) in India was normalized over the next 20 years or
33 so into the new millennium, when market forces co-opted the new 'science' of the
34 future – forecasting and modelling (Waslekar and Bhatt, 2004).
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52 In 2010, through a series of econometric forecasting and modelling, the global
53 consultancy firm McKinsey argued that India was undergoing an 'urban awakening'
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(McKinsey Global Institute, 2010) of sorts, and it was for this reason that building inclusive cities needed to go hand in hand with sustaining economic growth. Market led urbanization became the mainstay of urban development policies in India, and has more recently morphed into a model of entrepreneurial and speculative urbanization (Datta, 2015; Goldman, 2011), envisioned, directed and implemented entirely by the private sector with the support and involvement of the public sector. The ethically elevated positioning of the IT industry provides the ‘blueprint for governance’ (Dasgupta, 2015: 4) towards an urban future that is paradoxically represented by the state as an opportunity for reforming public institutions and initiating radical urban transformations through smart cities.

The rise of new media and new forms of ICT directed by the private sector has ironically supported the mythical storytelling of an ancient future. This myth presents a new mode of imagining and governing the city that seeks to do away with what Krishna (1992) notes as ‘oppressive pasts’. This is legitimized through a construct of earlier governance as broken at best and corrupt at worst. In 2014, during political campaigning, India’s current prime minister (a BJP candidate) said, "This is the land of Lord Ram where people believed in '*pran jaye par vachan na jaye*' (one may lose life but cannot break promise). Can you pardon those who broke their promises?" (PTI 2014). Only recently, while campaigning for regional state elections, one of the BJP political elite claimed that ‘BJP will win and establish Ramrajya’ (PTI 2016) again. Various referring to earlier modes of governance as ‘goonda raj’ [gangster rule], ‘jungle raj’ [wild rule] and several other such allegories, the radical transformation of state morality from decrepitude to credibility claims to establish Ram Rajya as a postcolonial metaphor for good governance in India. The ubiquitous presence of ICT is seen to enhance the potential for information transfer and

transparency, by installing checks against the past practices of a 'corrupt state' and holding it accountable. 'Good governance' vested in a future combining technology and the mythological state is intended as a remedial measure to the obfuscatory, illegible and informal nature of recent governance. In this it is not that mythology is oppositional to technology, but as I argue next, the state as 'government' retracts its bureaucracy and illegibility in favour of a fast, transparent and technocratic governance model.

"Minimum government, maximum governance"

In 2014, a new political party, the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) came to power with absolute majority in India with the slogan 'Minimum government, maximum governance' (MGMG). They presented an image of a postcolonial Indian future that would shed its inertia and illegibility of bureaucracy to make governance more transparent and accountable to speed up development. MGMG ingenuities were initiated through a series of laws, policies, initiatives and bureaucratic restructuring to 'fast track' applications, approval processes and clearance timelines of infrastructure and urban development projects. This was claimed to impose 'greater discipline in public administration through a personalistic, centralised and technocratic style of rule' (Ruparelia, 2015: 755). Marked by a swathe of programmes with slogans – Digital India, Make in India, Startup India, Clean India and driven by a 'rhetoric of urgency' (Datta 2015), this drive was legitimized by global forecasts (by McKinseys, Accenture, Pricewaterhouse Coopers and others) of an impending urban age, where not to act in the present would lead to apocalyptic urban crises in the future. Global consultancies, political elites and bureaucrats argued that 'urbanization is an opportunity and not a challenge' (*The Times of India*, 2013) which bolstered the MGMG approach to futuring. MGMG initiatives sought to craft a new vocabulary of

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an imminent future, connecting manufacturing industries, communications technologies and city beautification schemes into a customised package of laws, regulations, policies, projects and foreign direct investments.

When the BJP came to power in 2014, they initiated a ‘Good Governance day’ commemorating the birthday of Atal Behari Vajpayee, the BJP Prime Minister from 1998-2004 who was responsible for a resurgence of private sector investments in large infrastructure projects. The MGMG paradigm develops this private sector partnership by marking the retraction of ‘Government’ as paternalistic state and re-emergence of ‘governance’ as technologically enhanced development. It situates a postcolonial future within a techno-utopian space while evoking what Braun (2014) calls an ‘ad hoc, and ex post facto nature of ‘government’ as a set of diverse and loosely connected efforts to introduce ‘economy’ into existing relations’ in the future. Put simply, the MGMG initiatives are a way to push digitisation into everyday transactions between the state and citizen through market actors. This is an extension of the digital revolution emerging since the 1990s, through which MGMG aims for ubiquitous urban governance. This is also evident in the recent launch of several schemes such as biometric citizenship cards (Aadhar), demonetisation and the championing of cashless transactions, uniform taxation system (called Goods and Service Tax) and so on. This has ironically bolstered ‘executive power by limiting political transparency, parliamentary government and social dissent’ (Ruparelia, 2015: 756). MGMG strategies have been critiqued to uphold a ‘digitally reconstituted public sphere at the service of authoritarian protectionism’ (Gurumurthy et al., 2016: 381). They form the public face of a paternalistic state that deploys a set of utopian myths around technology and speed. Here fast urbanism under the watchful eyes of the state becomes the synonym for good governance, ‘combining market-oriented

policy positions on one hand with interventionist, “public interest” policy making on the other’ (Gurumurthy et al., 2016: 374).

Ramrajya as the smart city: Imagining ‘ancient futures’

In one of our stakeholder workshops in India, a presentation by the municipal official began, ‘I did not know what utopia was, till you invited me to your workshop. I went on google to learn more about it and learnt about utopia and dystopia. I think that currently Indian cities are like dystopia. [paraphrased from presentation notes]. This official then went on to elaborate that Indians need better planned cities and it was not acceptable to imitate models from the West. So how do smart cities fit in? He answered. ‘We already had smart cities in Indian history’ For him, Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa civilisations were ancient examples of smart cities for they were built with ‘spirituality, technology, nature and trade’ [quote]. Indeed, he claimed, they were the Indian version of smart cities preceding imports of this idea from the West. The city official further stated, ‘For us utopia is Ramrajya and Smart cities will be like Ramrajya’ [paraphrased from presentation notes].

This presentation was delivered without irony, without reference to the history and genealogy of utopian planning or Ram Rajya in India. The discursive appropriation of a global urban trope within the history of the Indian subcontinent can be seen as a ‘narrative leap’ (Dasgupta 2015, 6) which translated an ethico-religious myth of Ram Rajya as historical fact embodied in actually existing monuments (Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa civilizations) and linked this to a technological future. This ‘leap’ is not simply a reimagining of its historicity, rather its translation into a popular cultural and mythical motif. For this official, Ramrajya was an affirmative future – an imaginary made real through the smart city. By using examples of ancient civilizations, the nation was not limited to national territory (since these monuments

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are now in Pakistan), rather it was constructed as an imagined space of nationhood that surpassed territorialisation. Ram Rajya thus simultaneously urbanized mythology and mythologised the urban future.

Here myth becomes the modality where an ambiguous meaning of the smart city (without an accepted definition) is made material (in its digital infrastructures) and revealed as symbolic (in the moral state). Here the meaning of Ram Rajya and the smart city are both mined out of their specific discourses in a process of “auto-substitution”. Ramrajya then becomes a narrative story with a structure linking the past to the present and suggesting directions for India’s urban future. This does not necessarily reject the ‘archetypal myths around qualitative contextual factors such as identity, community, sacredness, and nature’ (Wuellner, 2011: 662) related to Hindu nationhood, rather presents the smart city in the image of a technological utopia that incorporate these myths.

This presentation is not coincidental to the wider debates on Ramrajya I have identified earlier in this paper. In the new millennium, BJP political elite have begun to invoke Ram Rajya as a metaphor for urbanization. Their pro-Hindutva politics combine global business interests in the smart city, while at the same time presenting this as a distinctly Indian paradigm of objective, efficient and equitable governance. This was evident in 2010, when the BJP announced in the regional state of Gujarat announced that they were executing a policy from ‘gram-rajya’ (village rule) to ‘Ram Rajya’. The then Chief Minister of Gujarat said, *‘My idea is to create a rural-urban connect where the soul is of a rural bent but with an urban touch’*. This became popularly referred to as the ‘Gujarat model’ of development – a model which he promised to scale up to the national level when he was elected as Prime Minister in 2014.

This use of the Ramrajya, Udayakumar (1996) notes is the betrayal of India's original futurist – Gandhi. *Ram Rajya* was evoked by Mahatma Gandhi during India's independence movement. The Gandhian *Ram Rajya* however reinforced the ideal of *Swaraj* (self-rule) or freedom from colonial rule. Crucially, the Gandhian Ram Rajya was located in India's rural landscape – constructing its villages as key sites of postcolonial nation-building. His policies of Ram Rajya related to the production of self-sustaining villages through agricultural self-sufficiency and home-based industries that would bring equality and prosperity. The BJP idea of Ram Rajya could not be more different from the Gandhian Ram Rajya – the latter is pro-poor, pro-rural and pro-development; the former is pro-business, pro-urban and pro-enterprise.

Since the BJP came to power in 2014, 'Surajya' or good governance' repeatedly features in policy documents. 'Surajya' is the mobilisation of BJP's MGMG claim of giving citizens more control and transparency over planning and administrative processes. Its appearance in the mygov.in website is significant as the official website of the Indian government, which is run, developed and hosted by the National Informatics Centre, Department of Electronics & Information Technology, and the Ministry of Communications and IT. The mygov.in website hosts discussion groups, blogs, and conducts 'tasks' on its platform. But it also monitors and tracks the activities of its registered users, in order to promote the variety of policy initiatives through several social media hashtags on their current policies on investment, innovation and growth. The image and autograph of the Prime Minister endorses this on the main homepage with the quote 'Let us join in making this mass movement towards Surajya. Realise the hopes and aspirations of the people and take India to greater heights' (*MyGov.in*, n.d.).

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While Ramrajya imagines the moral state, Surajya seeks to govern the city in the image of Ramrajya. The transformation of Ramrajya to Surajya is the coming together of two overlapping regimes of the future – ancient and modern, in the smart city. In the dialectic between a mythical state and technocratic governance, smart cities can be made to stand for either. As an imaginary of the original ‘Hindu’ city in ancient history, smart cities can be made to stand for the Hindu nation. As a materialisation of speed and efficiency of governance, smart cities can be taken as a shorthand for technocratic modernity. In this vision, as I suggest below, the diversity of 100 smart cities across the country has begun to stand for a centralised vision of governance, overseen by the state and in partnership with the private sector.

Father-son relationship: Governing imagined futures

In another city workshop, the commissioner (a civil servant) while responding to a number of criticisms levelled at the new smart city model by several stakeholders, said that the relationship between the state and the city was like a ‘father-son relationship’ whereby ‘the father gives money and the son builds the house’. This meant that the son might not always agree with the father, but he heeded to his father in the knowledge that the father knew what was best. The smart city too was similar – the federal state paid the money and the city was expected to heed to the criteria set by the state. The filial bond between the state and the city was both a flow of cash and a relationship of deference.

This gendered cultural idiom reflects what smart city scholars have commented on as ‘state paternalism’ or ‘stewardship’ (Cardullo and Kitchin, 2017) and highlights the contradictions between policy-speak of local smart city definitions, and regulatory actions of centralised state rule. The filial metaphor referred to the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) Act 2015, through which the smart city model was to

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3 be governed in the future. The SPV Act requires each of the nominated 100 cities to
4 set up a parastatal company to oversee their package of smart city projects. The SPV
5 is directed by a CEO appointed by the federal state, and who cannot be removed by
6 the city authorities (without the permission of the federal state) for a minimum of
7 three years. This SPV will oversee 'efficient municipal spending' (GoI, 2015) through
8 'lighthouse' smart projects scalable and replicable in the future. The SPV governing
9 body did not have the provision to include any democratically elected city Mayors or
10 local councillors but will have full authority over municipal budgets, taking decisions
11 regarding which projects and neighbourhoods to target for its smart city initiatives.
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15 This is contrary to decades of global cities theses around the ascendancy of
16 city-states and against the recommendations of global urban agendas (such as in
17 SDGs or NUA) that direct more power to cities. Significantly the SPV violates the
18 74th Indian Constitutional Amendment, by excluding democratically elected urban
19 representatives from decision-making in the future smart city. Indeed the filial
20 metaphor is only partially applicable here since the father (state) does not pay fully
21 for building the house, since the federal smart cities package is deemed as inadequate
22 for the sweeping urban transformations imagined in the future. The filial metaphor
23 was also far from the Gandhian idea of Ram Rajya, where he used the father-son
24 relationship.
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28 *We call a State Ramrajya when both the ruler and his subjects are*
29 *straightforward, when both are pure in heart, when both are inclined*
30 *towards self-sacrifice, when both exercise restraint and self-control while*
31 *enjoying worldly pleasures, and, when the relationship between the two is*
32 *as good as that between a father and a son. [quoted in (Udayakumar, 1996:*
33 *974)]*
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The Gandhian filial bond referred to the state and its subjects bound together in a relationship of trust, openness and transparency. To Gandhi, this was the foundation of civil society, in which citizens (noted as ‘subjects’) and state alike would deliver their responsibilities towards each other. While the Gandhian model was gendered and promoted traditional hierarchies it was nevertheless rooted in sovereignty of subjects based on moral authority of the state.

The SPV model upholds the MGMG ethos of ‘minimum government’ at the city scale. The Commissioner responded to the criticisms thus – that the SPV model was imperative since ‘it was easier to work as a company than as a government’. He noted that ‘ultimately the problem with Indian cities is the lack of strong decision-making authority at city level’ hence private investors will have more faith in the SPV model than the municipal corporation model. In this model, although cities are the engines of economic growth, the city itself is not a central player in directing its own future. Mukhopadhyay (2014) has strongly critiqued the SPV model, arguing that ‘Cities need to be able to decide and act for themselves – make their own mistakes, celebrate their own successes. For this, they need to have their own financial resources, i.e., a buoyant tax base ... the ability to hire and, if necessary, fire their own staff.’ McNeill (2015) too warns of a similar situation in the IBM smart cities model that by channelling funds away from essential urban projects towards smart cities can create their own ‘path dependencies’ by getting locked into smart systems. Indeed, even in the UK, as Taylor-Buck and While (2015) observe, the smart cities initiative draws attention to the ‘weakened capacity of urban governments to control their infrastructural destiny and also constraints on the ability of the public and private sectors to innovate.’ By taking away the power of ULBs to set their own revenue structure, by starving the ULBs of their conventional sources of revenue, transferring

existing municipal revenues to the SPV budget, delivering urban decisions through private managerial appointments, the SPV establishes federal control over its cities via rule of law and in partnership with the private sector.

The use of SPV as a legal vehicle for the smart city implementation nationally, has already produced a contested terrain with several municipalities challenging their nomination and refusing to cooperate with the Smart cities challenge. Since our workshops took place, Navi Mumbai has withdrawn from its smart city nomination. The reasons cited are that it has sufficient funds to carry out its own smart city projects, rather than get into path dependency with the federal state. Similarly, West Bengal, a regional state in Eastern India has rejected the federal Smart Cities programme altogether. This is no less an aspect of India's wider politics, given that the regional state is ruled by an opposition party. West Bengal claims to initiate its own regional urban renewal programme, whereby erstwhile nominated smart cities from the state will be rebranded under its 'green city' programme.

As Chatterjee (2004) notes this 'new urban politics' is a balance between 'governance as inscribed and governance as performed'. This is particularly the case with larger municipalities such as Navi Mumbai and Nashik which generate revenues far higher than the one-off funds from the Smart Cities Challenge. Local Councillors in these municipalities have pointed out that the funds do not distinguish between the geographic, economic and territorial specificities of the nominated cities. Hence while it locks smaller municipalities into path dependencies, it also coerces larger municipalities, which are so far financially sustainable to divert their funds for projects that are not locally relevant or even desirable for their citizens. In short, the smart city further marginalises those cities and populations already marginalised by its current development logics. It colonises the city with time, whereby the state

directs the timelines and duration of smart city projects through the SPV model and a range of other policies and time-bound deliverables. It also initiates a colonisation of time in the future city since it replaces the time-economies embodied in deliberative democratic processes with the time efficiencies of technologically driven governance.

Reimagining alternative futures

For some time, postcolonial urbanism has implicitly promoted a presentism in analysing the networks of knowledge and power in urban space. In this paper, I have argued that postcolonial urbanism needs to expand its critical lens to consider the dialectic relationship between past, present and future time and their deployment in the speed and politics of urban transformations. Postcolonial urbanism should be understood as a colonisation with/of time in imagining and governing future cities. I have argued that the spatio-temporality of postcolonial urbanism is revealed in a series of dialectical relationships across – past and future, mythology and technology, state and the city. These dialectics recast a mythical past as ancient future while a mythology of ethno-religious nationhood bolsters the imagination of a technocratic urbanism. In this context Indian smart cities as the signifier of the speed and temporality of modern technology are constructed as the harbinger of an accountable, transparent and neutral state, while simultaneously mythologised as the materialisation of a Hindu nation. Governing this imagined urban future ironically presents the final set of dialectics between a paternalistic state empowered by its partnership with the private sector and a future smart city impoverished of its autonomy and sovereignty.

In the context of Africa, Simone (2016) has astutely observed that ‘cities are particularly replete with violence of the imagination (Hengehold 2013), where hopes, fears, aspirations and dreams are shaped by the inability of past knowledge and

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3 affiliations and future promises and trajectories of livelihood formation to provide
4 adequate maps for how individuals can lead viable lives'. India's imagination of 100
5 smart urban futures repeats this violence of imagination. It shows us how imagining
6 the future in the technologically enhanced smart cities and projecting this as a vision
7 of mythical state is the techné of rule of the postcolonial state. The dialectics of
8 imagining and governing urban futures suggest how they reflect a paradoxical
9 partnership between mythology and technology that has impoverished the imagination
10 of more progressive urban futures. India's urban future speaks to a mythical (rather
11 than historical) relationship with the past, where instead of learning from the actually
12 existing failures of past visions of the future, it reaches out to the ideologies vested in
13 the mythical moral state.

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15 At first glance, this translation of mythology into technology and vice versa
16 can be seen as the provincialisation of a universalism vested in networked urbanism.
17 The translation of Ram Rajya into Surajya provides a culturally identifiable marker
18 for ordinary citizens to relate it to prosaic transactions with the state. It can be seen to
19 offer a route to the decolonisation of knowledge and action that have been co-opted
20 by the knowledge and power vested in western modernity. If decolonisation is to
21 reclaim the global from the vantage point of the indigenous and subaltern subject,
22 Ramrajya certainly provides the vocabulary to not just decolonise the global rhetoric
23 on smart cities, but also the middle-class co-optation of civil society in India.
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25 Ramrajya as an idealised state for the masses, ruling with moral honour and justice for
26 all provides the perfect cover for a range of transformations of horizontal and vertical
27 relations between – state and citizen, urban and federal state and between the past and
28 present. It addresses postcolonial anxieties of modernity and development through

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assertions of moral supremacy and closes down all other questions of justice, rights and social difference.

Understanding smart cities as a futuring practice enables us to rethink what postcolonial urbanism means in the context of India. I suggest that despite claims to rationality, efficiency and linearity, the postcolonial moment in India’s urban future is the ambiguousness between rational and mythological futures, between linear and non-linear notions of progress and development, and between singular and multiscalar spaces of futuring. If the speeding up of time is crucial to futuring the urban, postcolonial urbanism can be seen as a spatio-temporality of power and knowledge that is fundamentally about changing relations between past, present and future time. The centrality of time in postcolonial literature is not new but a consideration of the impacts of speed, time and mythology on postcolonial urbanism transforms the ways we analyse the reach and power of urban transformations driven by smart cities. I have suggested that this transformation is not just spatial or scalar but radically and fundamentally about imagining and governing postcolonial time in shaping our understandings of history, subjectivity, morality and modernity. It has not been possible in this paper to address how the postcolonial time of imagining and governing smart cities impacts on everyday subaltern futuring by those outside the social, political and legal margins of the city and its futures. The geopolitical imaginations of futures among subaltern groups are often a crucial complement to the mythologies of technology and speed. As postcolonial time is expanded to bolster mythical visions of ‘popular sovereignty’ what is missing is a simultaneous ‘translation into an effective challenge to the structural foundations of socio-economic and political domination’. The laws and policies brought about to materialise smart

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3 cities, have supported the co-optation of urban autonomy through the colonisation of
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5 and with postcolonial time.
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7 The dialectics between mythology and technology in imagining and governing
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9 the smart city suggests that postcolonial urbanism can also be seen as a rescaling of
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11 postcolonial time in the future city. This means seeing time as inherently spatial in
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13 postcolonial urbanism. The ‘ancient future’ of mythical nationhood and its rescaling
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15 in the technological futures of the smart city highlights the ironies of imagining
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17 nationhood in the city by withdrawing urban power and autonomy in its governance.
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19 The scalar and spatial nature of postcolonial time means that its speed is relative to
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21 the ways that past, present and future is imagined and governed at different scales and
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23 spaces.
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26 Rethinking the parameters of postcolonial urbanism through time highlights
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28 the faultlines of India’s urban age that seeks to speed up the future through
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30 technology and authenticate this through a mythical nationhood. While the extent of
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32 proliferation of mythologies of Ramrajya in smart city policy circles might be subject
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34 to debate, what is clear however is that any notion of a single technological future is
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36 insufficient for understanding the actually existing present. Futuring is not only about
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38 an imaginary, its crucially about how this imaginary is used to justify and legitimise
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40 control over the present. What it tries to obscure in this process is its own muddling
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42 through, of vast manifestations of trial and error, incomplete calculations, and half-
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44 baked solutions (Datta, 2018). Thus governance of the smart city also means the
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46 governance of the nature of time conceived during its inception as the speeding up via
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48 technology unbound. Speeding up entails the demonstration of a façade of governing
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50 the duration of present time so that the coming of the ‘future’ smart city may be
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52 strategically monitored. It means acknowledging that while there is a wider debate in
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postcolonial urbanism around politicizing the present, any attempts to do so also inherently embodies a politics of the future.

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